

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

USIA-12 ACDA-19 GAC-01 SAJ-01 NIC-01 MC-02 TRSE-00

OMB-01 EB-11 COME-00 CIEP-02 NEA-10 AID-20 IO-12

RSR-01 /191 W

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R 120915 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8998

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USINT ALGIERS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 2181

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MO UR MASS EGEN

SUBJECT: MOROCCAN- SOVIET RELATIONS ENTERING NEW PHASE

1. SUMMARY. NEW PHASE OF CLOSER MOROCCAN- SOVIET RELATIONS HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY REPORTS SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN TRANSPORTING MOROCCAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND TROOPS TO SYRIA, INCREASE IN SOVIET MILITARY AID, AND CLOSER COMMERCIAL TIES. SOVIETS PRESUMABLY HOPE INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE IN MOROCCO AND ARAB WORLD. MOROCCANS, WHO CONTINUING SEEK ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM WIDE VARIETY SOURCES, INCLUDING USG, HAVE STRESSED TO US THAT THEIR REASONS FOR TURNING TO USSR FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT ARE PRACTICAL AND NOT POLITICAL. WHILE THIS PROBABLY TRUE, THERE ARE DISQUIETING ELEMENTS IN NEW RELATIONSHIP. END SUMMARY
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2. IN RECENT MONTHS AND NOTABLY SINCE FON MIN BENIMA' S VISIT TO MOSCOW IN JANUARY THERE HAVE BEEN INCREASING SIGNS OF CLOSER GOM- SOVIET RELATIONS. DESPITE MUCH- NOTED PRESENCE OF MILITARY OFFICERS IN GOM DELEGATION, JANUARY VISIT TO

MOSCOW WAS ADVERTISED AS BEING IN CONTEXT REGULAR MEETINGS SOVIET- GOM COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND ACCORDING GOM SOURCE PRIMARILY CONCERNED SALE MOROCCAN PRODUCTS IN USSR, FORTHCOMING MOROCCAN FIVE- YEAR PLAN AND RELATED COMMERCIAL SUBJECTS (RABAT 511). IT HAS SINCE BECOME EVIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS MORE THAN ROUTINE MEETING AND THAT IT HAD PREPARED WAY FOR INCREASE IN SOVIET AID TO MOSCOW.

3. FOLLOWING SUBSEQUENT VISIT TO MOSCOW LATE MARCH BY GOM DELEGATION LED BY MINISTER OF COMMERCE BENSLIMANE, SOVIET NEWS AGENCY NOVOSTI PUBLISHED UPBEAT ACCOUNT CITING AGREEMENT IN MOSCOW CONCERNING COOPERATION IN DAM CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM, IRRIGATION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT, GEOLOGICAL RESEARCH, EXPLORATION FOR PETROLEUM AND GAS, AND (IN PRINCIPLE) EXTRACTION OF PHOSPHATES. NOVOSTI ACCOUNT ALSO SAID THAT DURING THIRD QUARTER 1973 THERE WILL BE MEETING IN MOROCCO OF SOVIET EXPERTS AND MOROCCANS TO STUDY POSSIBILITY OF FORMING JOINT VENTURE FOR FISHING, FISH PROCESSING AND MARKETING , AS WELL AS SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO DETERMINE FISH RESERVES OF COASTAL WATERS. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL THAT SALE OF FISHING VESSELS BY SOVIETS TO MOROCCO IS BEING CONSIDERED. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT PRIOR MARCH MEETING MOROCCANS AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO ACCEPT SOVIET OFFER OF COLD STORAGE UNITS UNDER 1966 CREDIT.

4. MOST DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN OF MILITARY NATURE. SOVIETS ARE PLAYING LEADING ROLE IN TRANSPORT OF MOROCCAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND (PROBABLY IN NEAR FUTURE) TROOPS TO SYRIA AND ALSO RE- ENTERING FIELD OF MILITARY SALES. IN APRIL TWO SOVIET LST' S AND ONE FREIGHTER LOADED MOROCCAN EQUIPMENT AT MERS EL- KEBIR NEAR ORAN AND DELIVERED IT TO SYRIA FOR USE BY MOROCCAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. ALSO IN APRIL, THIRTY- FIVE SOVIET FLYING PERSONNEL APPEARED IN MEKNES AND FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS ANTONOV 12 AIRCRAFT MADE CONFIDENTIAL

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DAILY FLIGHTS OUT OF MEKNES AIR BASE. EARLY FLIGHTS REPORTEDLY BROUGHT IN EQUIPMENT AND SPARE PARTS, BUT MOST OF FLIGHTS PRESUMABLY USED FOR MOVEMENT MILITARY EQUIPMENT DESTINED FOR USE IN SYRIA, ALTHOUGH THERE NUMBER UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THEY USED FOR SHIPMENT OLD MIG 15' S MOROCCANS OBTAINED FROM USSR IN '60 S (NOT CLEAR WHAT RATIONALE FOR SUCH SHIPMENT WOULD BE). FURTHER INDICATION INCREASED SOVIET INTEREST IN MOROCCO WAS APRIL 23 ARRIVAL SOVIET GENERAL OFFICER AS MILITARY ATTACHE TO REPLACE COLONEL.

5. SUBSEQUENT TO BENHIMA VISIT TO MOSCOW IN JANUARY, FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL WHO WAS MEMBER OF DELEGATION TOLD US THAT MILITARY MEMBERS OF DELEGATION HAD BEEN ALONG SOLELY TO DISCUSS SPARE PARTS ACQUISITION (RABAT 511). FOREIGN MINISTER

HIMSELF, HOWEVER, SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD US (RABAT 888) THAT IN MOSCOW MOROCCANS HAD ASKED SOVIETS TO CONSIDER POSSIBILITY OF LIGHT MILITARY EQUIPMENT, SUCH AS LIGHT TANKS, AND SAID SOVIETS PROMISED TO STUDY THESE REQUESTS. AT ABOUT SAME TIME ANOTHER SOURCE SAID MOROCCANS HAD ASKED FOR ARMORED VEHICLES AND PATROL BOATS AND SOVIETS HAD REPLIED THEY HAD ONLY ONE BOAT OF TYPE MOROCCANS WANTED AT THAT MOMENT, WITH OTHERS POSSIBLY BECOMING AVAILABLE AT LATER DATE.

6. IN MARCH VISIT TO WASHINGTON FON MIN BENHIMA SAID HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED BY KING TO EXPLAIN WHY MOROCCO HAD TURNED TO SOVIET UNION FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT. CHOICE OF SOVIET EQUIPMENT WAS PRACTICAL, NOT POLITICAL. MOROCCO NEEDED NEW LIGHTWEIGHT EQUIPMENT TO IMPROVE ITS CAPABILITY FOR QUICK FLEXIBLE RESPONSE. SOVIETS HAD SMALL TANKS AVAILABLE AT LOW PRICES WHICH WOULD INVOLVE NO HARD CURRENCY DRAIN, AS MOROCCO HAD \$5-6 MILLION PER YEAR TRADE SURPLUS WITH USSR. SOVIETS MOREOVER WERE OFFERING HELICOPTERS WITH SHORT LEAD TIME (UNLIKE BELL OFFER), AND HAD CLAIMED THEY COULD SUPPLY RADAR EQUIPMENT MOROCCANS ARE SEEKING. BENHIMA ALSO NOTED THAT AS GOM HAS EXTENDED ITS FISHING ZONE TO 70 MILES IT VITALLY NEEDS COASTAL PATROL BOATS.

7. BEHIMA' S WASHINGTON STATEMENTS WERE MADE IN CONTEXT PLEA FOR LARGE INCREASE IN MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID FROM US. AND NOTABLY FOR KIND OF PRIVILEGED RELATIONSHIP WITH US IN ITS PART OF MEDITERRANEAN THAT SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN HAVE
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ENJOYED IN MIDDLE EAST. WHILE TURNING TOWARD MOSOCW, GOM ALSO IS LOOKING TOWARD WIDE VARIETY OTHER POTENTIAL SOURCES OF AID, BOTH FOR MILITARY DEFENSE AND TO FINANCE FORTHCOMING AMBITIOUS FIVE- YEAR PLAN. EXAMPLES: (A) FOLLOWING VISIT TO MADRID, BENHIMA SPOKE OF GOM' S DESIRE FOR GLOBAL AID PROGRAM FROM ECONOMICALLY EXPANDING SPAIN, AND EVIDENTLY HAD EXPRESSED WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE PASSING INTEREST IN ACQUISITION F-5' S FROM SPAIN. (B) PRINCE MOULAY ABDALLAH HAS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM FUND- RAISING TOUR TO SAUDI ARABIA, GULF STATES, AND IRAN. (C) BELGIAN AMBASSADOR INFORMS US HE WAS CALLED IN NOON LAST SATURDAY BY BENHIMA WITH REQUEST FOR SPARE PARTS FOR AIRPLANES, WHICH HE TERMS AS ONE MORE MANIFESTATION OF GOM POLICY OF OUTSTRETCHED HAND. (D) FRENCH HERE ALSO TELL US MOROCCANS HAVE BEEN PRESENTING REQUESTS FOR INCREASED MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID IN SAME IMPRECISE TERMS THEY USING WITH US.

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PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12 AID-20 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-19

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8. WE DO NOT AT PRESENT KNOW WHAT MILITARY EQUIPMENT SOVIETS HAVE OFFERED SUPPLY AND ON WHAT TERMS BEYOND WHAT BENHIMA HAS TOLD US. APPARENT ALACRITY WITH WHICH SOVIETS HAVE RESPONDED TO MOROCCAN REQUEST FOR TRANSPORTATION TO SYRIA, SOMETHING ARAB BROTHERS WERE UNWILLING SUPPLY, INDICATES CONSIDERABLE READINESS TO BE HELPFUL.

9. SOME OF SOVIET MOTIVATION IS PERHAPS ECONOMIC. THEY HAVE EQUIPMENT FOR SALE AND MOROCCANS ARE WILLING BUYERS. THEY ALSO PRESUMABLY HOPE TO INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE IN ARAB WORLD IN GENERAL AND MOROCCO IN PARTICULAR. MOROCCO' S STRATEGIC LOCATION IS OF IMPORTANCE TO SOVIETS AS IT IS TO US. SOVIETS, TOO, LIKE SHIP VISITS FOR THEIR NAVY. THEY UNDOUBTEDLY ALSO WOULD LIKE PORT FACILITIES, BUT WE DO NOT CONSIDER THIS REALISTIC OBJECTIVE UNDER CURRENT OR ANY FORESEEABLE MOROCCAN REGIME. SOVIETS ALSO HAVE EVIDENT CONFIDENTIAL

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INTEREST IN US ACTIVITIES IN MOROCCO AND ANYTHING THAT GETS THEM INTO MILITARY FIELD INCREASES THEIR ABILITY FIND OUT ABOUT US. ALSO, BY HELPING GOM THEY CAN FACILITATE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THEIR SUPPORTERS IN MOROCCO (IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT RECENT GOM - SOVIET RAPPROCHEMENT HAS COINCIDED WITH INCREASE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF VETERAN COMMUNIST LEADER ALI YATA AND SEEMINGLY CENSOR- FREE LIBERTY IN PUBLISHING HIS WEEKLY NEWSPAPER).

10. CONCLUSION. WHILE MOROCCANS PROBABLY MEAN IT WHEN THEY SAY THEY WOULD RATHER GET EQUIPMENT FROM US IF OUR TERMS WERE RIGHT, WHILE WESTERN STATES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE BE MAJOR SOURCE OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO MOROCCO, AND WHILE WE HAVE NO DOUBT MOROCCANS HAVE NO DESIRE BE DEPENDENT ON OR GIVE MILITARY FACILITIES TO SOVIETS, THERE ARE DISQUIETING ASPECTS TO DEVELOPMENTS DESCRIBED ABOVE. ASSUMING MOROCCANS STICK TO BENHIMA' S FIGURES AND ONLY BUY \$5 OR \$6 MILLION PER YEAR WORTH OF EQUIPMENT FROM SOVIETS, THAT WILL STILL AMOUNT TO ROUGHLY 50 PERCENT OF ANNUAL VALUE OF OUR MILITARY AID PROGRAM, AND IF SOVIETS GIVE FRIENDLY PRICES, OR CHOOSE GIVE MATERIEL AWAY, AMOUNT OF EQUIPMENT INVOLVED COULD BE CONSIDERABLE. THIS CONCEIVABLY COULD PROVIDE OCCASION FOR SOVIETS TO SEND IN MAAG AND TO ESTABLISH CLOSE LIAISON WITH MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES. EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE HAS SHOWN THAT SOVIET ADVISORS USUALLY ISOLATED THROUGH CHOICE USSR AND HOST GOVERNMENTS, BUT CREATION MOROCCAN- SOVIET LIAISON OFFICE WOULD STILL GIVE SOVIETS INCREASEDPOTENTIAL FOR SPYING ON US AND FOR INFLUENCING ATTITUDE MOROCCAN MILITARY, WHO ARE KEY ELEMENT IN COUNTRY. WE WOULD HOPE MOROCCANS WOULD HOLD OUT AGAINST SOVIET MAAG, BUT ACCEPTANCE MAY TURNOUT TO BE PRICE FOR EQUIPMENT THEY DECIDE THEY HAVE TO ACQUIRE. IF THIS OCCURS, MOROCCANS LIKELY MAKE SAME " DISCOVERY" EGYPTIANS DID 18 YEARS AGO THAT SOVIETS NOT QUITE AS BAD AS ADVERTISED AND TO HAVE SAME ILLUSIONS ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH SOVIETS ON THEIR OWN TERMS. THIS WOULD NOT BE HELPFUL TO OUR POSIION HERE. ON OTHER HAND, FACT THAT MOROCCANS ACCEPT SOVIET AID COULD MAKE THEM LESS LIKELY TO WANT US TO LESSEN OUR MILITARY PRESENCE HERE. MOROCCANS ARE EXPERTS IN BALANCING ACTS. MOROCCANS MAY ALSO BE ATEMPTING CREATE ATMOSPHERE TO PRESSURE US TO BE

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MORE FORTHCOMING IN PROVIDING AID. AND, WHILE SOVIETS UNDERSTANDABLY CAN BE EXPECTED TO TRY TO DERIVE ADVANTAGES FROM A CLOSER AND MORE FORTHCOMING RELATIONSHIP, WE ASSUME THEY WOULD GO VERY SLOWLY IN APPLYING PRESSURE IN ORDER NOT TO ENDANGER WHATEVER NEW POSITION THEY ATTAIN.

11. IT IS UNDENIABLE , IN ANY EVENT, THAT SOVIETS ARE RESPONDING AFFIRMATIVELY TO MOROCCANS IN CONTEXT ARAB- ISRAEL DISPUTE IN MANNER WHICH WE CANNOT MATCH. IF MOROCCANS BECOME MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN NEAR EAST, THEIR NEED FOR SOVIET HELP LIKELY INCREASE. SOVEITS PRESUMABLY ARE PREPARED SUPPLY THEM EQUIPMENT WE WILL NOT PROVIDE, AND INVIDIOUS COMPARISONS WILL BE MADE. WHILE GOM DESIRE FOR OUR FRIENDSHIP REMAINS STRONG, POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS US ARE BEING COLORED BY INFLAMMATORY REPORTING FROM BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE IN ARAB WORLD. WE HAVE NOT NOTED ANY CONCOMITANT INCREASE IN SOVIET POPULARITY, NOR WOULD WE ARGUE THAT THIS IS ZERO SUM GAME, BUT SOVIETS ARE ON SIDE OF ANGELS AND HAVE OPPORTUNITY

TODAY THEY DID NOT HAVE SIX MONTHS AGO.

12. WE DO NOT WISH EXAGGERATE IMPORTANCE ABOVE, BUT BELIEVE
USG SHOULD BE ALERT TO FACT WE ARE WITNESSING NEW PHASE IN
MOROCCAN-- SOVIET RELATIONS.
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